



**NOAA FISHERIES**  
NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION



Tuna Tracking and Verification Program  
National Marine Fisheries Service  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
United States Department of Commerce

Dolphin-safe Captain's Training Course

March 23, 2016

Email Questions in English  
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# Introduction

In order for tuna to qualify as “dolphin safe” in the United States, U.S. regulations require a written statement from the Captain of the vessel certifying that no purse seine net or other fishing gear was intentionally deployed on or used to encircle dolphins during the fishing trip in which the tuna were caught, and that no dolphins were killed or seriously injured in the sets or other gear deployments in which the tuna were caught.

Captain certification of completion of this course is required for all fishing trips (other than for large purse seine vessels fishing in the eastern tropical Pacific Ocean having a carrying capacity of more than 400 short tons (362.8 mt)) that ***begin on or after May 21, 2016***. Updated captain’s statement templates are available at:

<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/dolphinsafe/cst.htm>

## **This training course will cover four main topics:**

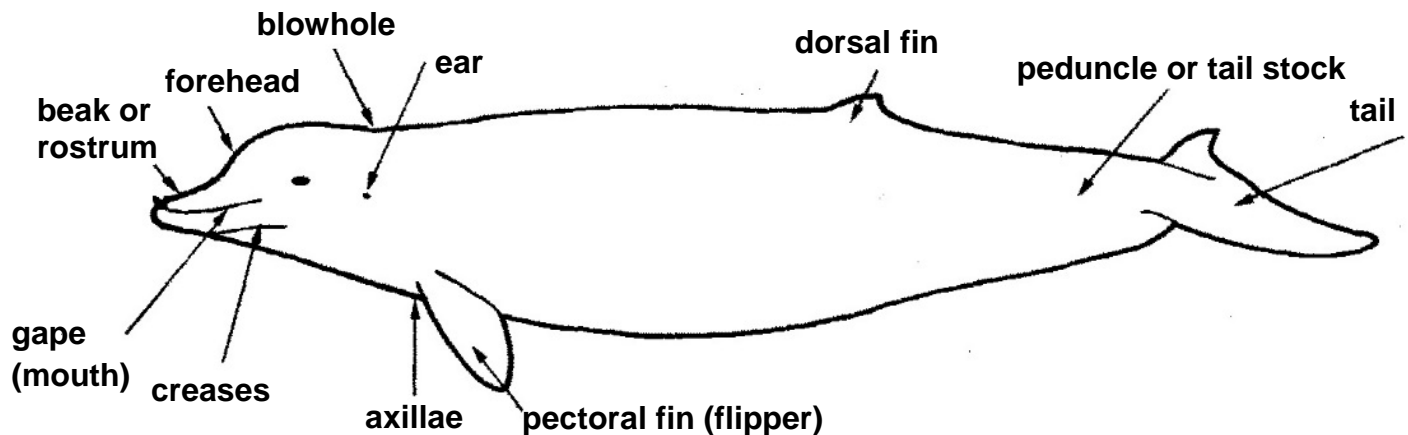
- A. Identifying dolphins of the taxonomic family *Delphinidae*.
- B. Identifying intentional gear deployment on or encirclement of dolphins.
- C. Identifying dolphin mortality (i.e., death) and serious injury.
- D. Physically separating dolphin-safe tuna from non-dolphin-safe tuna.

The following drawings are adapted from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) publication “Marine Mammals of the World” by Thomas A. Jefferson, Stephen Leatherwood, and Marc A. Webber; 1993.

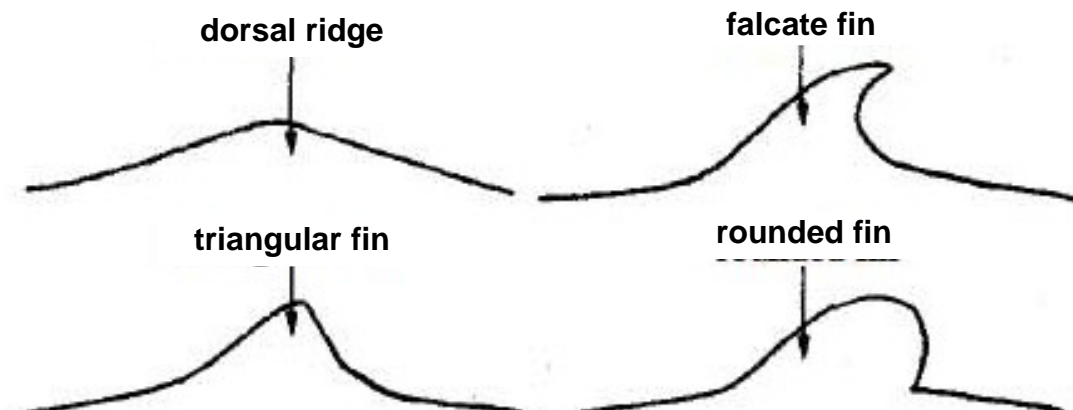
This document may be viewed or downloaded from the FAO web site at:

<http://www.fao.org/docrep/009/t0725e/t0725e00.htm>

### **Illustrated Glossary of Technical Terms**



### **Dorsal fin examples**



## **A) Identifying Dolphins of the Taxonomic Family *Delphinidae***

Purpose: The National Marine Fisheries Service does not require captains to identify dolphins down to the species level. However, a captain must be able to identify whether an individual animal belongs to the dolphin taxonomic family, *Delphinidae*.

- Dolphins are small cetaceans with a single blowhole, teeth and no baleen.
- Dolphins are members of the family *Delphinidae*.
- Most members of the family *Delphinidae*:
  - Range in size from 1 to 1.8 meters for the smallest dolphins and up to 9.8 meters for the largest male killer whales.
  - Live in a marine habitat.
  - Have a noticeable beak. Some exceptions to this are pilot whales, false killer whales, Risso's dolphins, and killer whales.
  - Have pointed or tapered teeth.
  - Have a falcate dorsal fin located near the middle of the dolphin's back (see drawing on the previous page). Falcate means "curved" on the rear edge. However, the Northern Right Whale dolphin has no dorsal fin.

There are exceptions to all of these, but most dolphins have these characteristics.

For information on dolphin identification by species, please see the appropriate chapters in the publication "Marine Mammals of the World" by the FAO. Click [here](#) to view or download this publication from the FAO web site. You may also type the following Web address into your Internet browser to view this publication online:

<http://www.fao.org/docrep/009/t0725e/t0725e00.htm>

## **B) Identifying Intentional Gear Deployment on or Encirclement of Dolphins**

**All** tuna harvested on a fishing trip does not qualify as “dolphin safe” in the United States, if at any time, a purse seine net or other fishing gear was intentionally deployed on or used to encircle dolphins during that fishing trip.

For example, where a purse seine vessel deploys its net, if a dolphin(s) is seen in the encirclement area of the net only after the start of the set (i.e., the skiff is let go), this is considered an accidental capture set and is not considered an intentional deployment or encirclement of dolphins.

## C) Identifying Dolphin Mortality and Serious Injury

### Mortality Determination:

- A dolphin that is observed to have died as a result of the fishing set or other gear deployment in which the tuna were caught. In other words, dolphin mortality means the dolphin's life has ended and it is dead.

### Serious Injury Determination:

- Dolphin “serious injury” means any injury that is more likely than not to lead to the death of the dolphin.
- The following two lists are to help the captain assess injury to dolphins. These lists only cover injuries likely to be seen during fishing activities.

## 1) The following injuries indicate a serious injury:

- Swallowed fishing gear, such as hooks
- A dolphin brought onto the vessel after it is caught
- Fishing hook(s) in the head
- Gear attached to a free-swimming dolphin with potential to: 1) become a constricting wrap on the animal; 2) be swallowed; 3) create or accumulate drag; or 4) become snagged on something in the environment, thus, anchoring the animal
- Anchored, immobilized, or entrapped and not freed
- Gear wrapped and constricting on any body part or is likely to become constricting as the animal moves or grows
- Visible fractures, excluding pectoral flippers
- Broken spinal column (i.e., broken back), including fully severed tail
- Body cavity penetration by foreign object or body cavity exposure (i.e., internal body organ(s) visible)
- Partially severed tail (i.e., more than half-way across the tail)
- Dependent animal (i.e., a calf or juvenile dolphin) released alone post-interaction or dependent animal left with a seriously injured or dead mother

2) The following injuries, on a case-by-case basis, may or may not indicate a serious injury. However, the presence of multiple injuries may be a serious injury, but again, that depends on the severity of each injury on a case-by-case basis:

- Observed or reported collision with a vessel
- Visible blood loss
- Hook(s) confirmed in lip only, external tissue outside of teeth, no trailing gear
- Hook(s) in any body part, but hook(s) is removed or pulls out
- Hook(s) in external body part (i.e., appendage) or body without trailing gear or with trailing gear that does not have the potential to: 1) become a constricting wrap on animal; 2) be ingested; 3) accumulate drag; or 4) become snagged on something in the environment, anchoring the animal
- Anchored, immobilized, entangled, or entrapped before being freed without gear attached. The longer this lasts, the more likely it is to cause a serious injury called 'capture myopathy.' Some dolphin species are more sensitive to capture myopathy and can be seriously injured after just a few minutes of entrapment
- Gear wrapped and loose on any body part
- Loss or disfigurement of dorsal fin
- Partially severed tail, not transecting midline
- Partially or completely severed or fractured pectoral flipper(s)
- Social animal separated from group and/or released alone post-interaction



## D) Physically Separating Dolphin-safe Tuna from Non-dolphin-safe Tuna

- If a dolphin death or serious injury occurs during a set or other gear deployment, all tuna from this set or other gear deployment is considered non-dolphin-safe and must be kept physically separate from dolphin-safe tuna caught in other sets or other gear deployments.
- The captain is responsible for ensuring dolphin-safe tuna is kept physically separate from non-dolphin-safe tuna.
- The captain is responsible for designating where non-dolphin-safe tuna is to be stored aboard the vessel.
- Tuna caught during a set where a dolphin was killed or seriously injured must be kept **physically separated** through unloading.
- If a purse seine vessel has more than one well used to store tuna, all tuna inside a well shall be considered non-dolphin-safe, if at any time non-dolphin-safe tuna is loaded into the well, regardless of the use of netting or other material inside the well. In other words, a captain is to designate which well is being used to store non-dolphin-safe tuna on a particular trip, if there was a set in which a dolphin was killed or seriously injured. The particular well the captain designates as storing non-dolphin-safe tuna may change each fishing trip. However, there may be fishing trips where there was no dolphin mortality or serious injury in any of the sets. Therefore, none of the wells on that fishing trip would contain non-dolphin-safe tuna.
- United States dolphin-safe regulations specify that for non-purse seine vessels, the use of netting, other material or separate storage areas can be used to keep dolphin-safe tuna physically separate from non-dolphin-safe tuna. For purse seine vessels with only one storage well, dolphin-safe tuna must be kept physically separate from non-dolphin-safe tuna by using netting or other material.

- Other materials can include trash bags, tarp, netting, fabric or other material that is readily available that can create a physical separation within the storage area.
- It should be noted that markings on the tuna, such as tying line to the tail or cutting off the tail, are **not** sufficient to meet the requirement to keep non-dolphin-safe tuna physically separated from dolphin-safe tuna.
- ***Example:*** For non-purse seine vessels and for purse seine vessels with only one storage well, a section of netting or a tarp can be laid over previously caught dolphin-safe tuna.
  - All non-dolphin-safe tuna from a particular set or gear deployment can then be stored on top of the netting or tarp.
  - At the end of the set or gear deployment, an additional section of netting or a tarp is laid on top of the non-dolphin-safe tuna.
  - By tagging both sections of netting or tarps, identification of the non-dolphin-safe tuna has been made so that future catches of dolphin-safe tuna can continue to be stored in the same vessel storage area on top of the non-dolphin-safe tuna.